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TRANSPOSING ARISTOPHANES: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATING
ARISTOPHANIC LYRIC

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TRANSPOSING ARISTOPHANES: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATING ARISTOPHANIC LYRIC

Introduction

The reception of Aristophanes has gained extraordinary momentum as a topic of academic interest in the last few years. Contributions range from Gonda Van Steen's ground-breaking *Venom in Verse. Aristophanes in Modern Greece* to Hall and Wrigley's *Aristophanes in Performance 421 BC–AD 2007*, which contains contributions from a wide range of scholars and writers, a number of whom have had experience of staging Aristophanes' plays as live theatre.¹ In *Found in Translation*, J. Michael Walton has also made strides towards marrying the theory of translation to the practice of translating Aristophanes (something I have myself also sought to do in print).² And with the history of Aristophanic translation, adaptation, and staging being rapidly pieced together (in the English-speaking world at least, where Hall, Steggle, Halliwell, Sowerby, Walsh, and Walton, for example, have all made their own contributions), much of the groundwork has been laid for a study such as is attempted in this article.³ Here I aim to take a broad look across a range of translations in order to see how one particular text type within Aristophanic drama has been approached by translators, namely Aristophanes' lyric passages. The aim of this

¹ G. Van Steen, *Venom in Verse. Aristophanes in Modern Greece* (Princeton, NJ, 2000); E. Hall and A. Wrigley (eds.), *Aristophanes in Performance 421 BC–AD 2007. Peace, Birds and Frogs* (London, 2007).

² J. M. Walton, *Found in Translation. Greek Drama in English* (Cambridge, 2006); J. Robson, 'Lost in Translation? The Problem of (Aristophanic) Humour', in L. Hardwick and C. Stray (eds.), *A Companion to Classical Receptions* (Oxford, 2007), 168–82; J. Robson, *Aristophanes. An Introduction* (London, 2009), ch. 10, 'Aristophanes in the Modern World: Translation and Performance', 188–218.

³ E. Hall, 'Introduction: Aristophanic Laughter Across the Centuries', in Hall and Wrigley (n. 1), 1–29; M. Steggle, 'Aristophanes in Early Modern England', in Hall and Wrigley (n. 1), 52–65; S. Halliwell, 'Aristophanes', in O. Classe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Literary Translation into English* (London, 2000); R. Sowerby, 'Aristophanes', in P. France (ed.), *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* (Oxford, 2000), 367–9; P. Walsh, 'A Study in Reception: The British Debates over Aristophanes' Politics and Influence', *Classical Receptions Journal* 1 (2009), 55–72; Walton (n. 2).

study will be to give both an insight into the numerous considerations that translators take into account when translating Aristophanic lyric and an impression of the range of end products that have emerged over the last two hundred years.

In the opening sections I look at theoretical positions that have been taken towards translation in general and the translation of poetry in particular, considering the ways in which these can inform debate about the translation of Aristophanic lyric. Special attention is then given to the different approaches that have been taken to translating the rhythms of these songs, particularly in relation to *Birds* 708–13 (a short section of the *parabasis*), *Birds* 676–84 (the Song to the Nightingale), *Birds* 209–22 (the Hoopoe's Song), and *Lysistrata* 271–80 (the Cleomenes Ode). A number of threads are then drawn together in a brief case study, where I look at the challenges presented by one of Aristophanes' most striking odes, *Acharnians* 263–79 (the Phallic Song). Lastly, I consider the extent to which developments in Aristophanic scholarship may have impacted on the way translators approach Aristophanic lyric.

Theorizing translation

What principles should underpin the act of translation? Where some texts are concerned, the goal of a translator is no doubt clear enough. In the case of a sign telling the public what days a museum is open, for example, the aim (or 'skopos' of the translation, to use Vermeer's terminology) is relatively easy to articulate.⁴ Theorists have given different names to the type of translation required of texts whose central purpose is to convey factual information: for Newmark, for example, it is 'communicative' translation; for Reiss, it is 'informative'.⁵

Naturally, literary texts provide the translator with a far more complex challenge than a museum sign. And this complexity has, in turn, given rise to a long tradition of debate about the nature and merits of different approaches to translating literature. Cicero and Horace were two of the early contributors to these discussions, but among the most

⁴ H. J. Vermeer, 'Skopos and Commission in Translation Theory', in A. Chesterman (ed.), *Readings in Translation Theory* (Helsinki, 1989), 173–87.

⁵ The characteristics of 'communicative' (as opposed to 'semantic') translation are summarized in P. Newmark, *About Translation. Multilingual Matters* (Clevedon, 1991), 10–13. For the characteristics of 'informative' translation, see K. Reiss, 'Text Types, Translation Types and Translation Assessment', in Chesterman (n. 4), 105–15.

cited views are those of John Dryden, who famously divides translation styles into ‘metaphrase’, ‘paraphrase’, and ‘imitation’ – ‘metaphrase’ being a word-for-word translation, ‘paraphrase’ a sense-for-sense translation, and ‘imitation’ a translation where more licence has been taken with the original. Dryden’s stated preference is for ‘paraphrase’, but his stance is not universally shared, and the twentieth century in particular saw strident cases made for the other two strategies. On the one hand, Vladimir Nabokov argued that a translation should take the form of a heavily footnoted word-for-word rendering of the text in question, accompanied by towers of explanatory footnotes;⁶ on the other, Ezra Pound suggested that a translation should be conceived as a ‘rewrite’ designed to convey the underlying energies of the original (he famously advised a translator, ‘Don’t bother about the WORDS, translate the MEANING’).⁷ In his seminal 1975 work, *After Babel*, George Steiner rejected Dryden’s three categories as a ‘sterile tripartite model’, but for all their imprecision the labels ‘metaphrase’, ‘paraphrase’, and ‘imitation’ remain useful shorthand when discussing the translation of poetry and are still widely quoted.⁸ Other notions that have proved equally persistent despite recent developments in translation theory include the idea of ‘letter’ and ‘spirit’ of the original work and the balance that should be struck between the two in order to remain ‘faithful’ to the source text.

Debates about ‘letter’, ‘spirit’, and ‘faithfulness’ continue to be reshaped by scholars working in the thriving academic discipline of translation studies, and for those wishing to describe the ways in which translators approach their work, there are a whole host of ways in which translations can be categorized. Is the translation ‘source-text orientated’, for instance (that is, does it aim to reflect the assumptions and values of the society that produced it, e.g. classical Athens) or is it ‘target-text orientated’ (that is, adapted to the norms and expectations of the receiving culture, e.g. the modern English-speaking world)?⁹ A slightly different distinction is made by Lawrence Venuti, who

⁶ V. Nabokov, ‘Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English’, in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader* (New York and London, 2000), 127 (originally published in *Partisan Review* 22 [1955], 496–512).

⁷ H. Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London, 1972), 150. The advice was given to Michael Reck concerning a proposed Japanese version of *Trachiniae* (to be based on Pound’s translation of the play).

⁸ G. Steiner, *After Babel*, new edition (Oxford, 1992), 319.

⁹ T. Hermans, *Translation in Systems* (Manchester, 1999), reformulating the ‘adequate’ v. ‘acceptable’ distinction made by G. Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies – And Beyond* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA, 1995).

coins the terms ‘foreignization’ and ‘domestication’. ‘Foreignization’ involves translating the text in such a way as to make readers aware that they are reading a text in translation (for example, by including anachronisms or by reflecting the word order of the original text), whereas ‘domestication’ involves ‘reduc[ing]...the foreign text to target language cultural values’ so as to make it immediately recognizable and intelligible to a reader, thus ‘bringing the author back home’.¹⁰ Venuti favours ‘foreignization’ as a translation strategy, advocating that translators should lose what he calls their ‘invisibility’.

Not that the practice of leaving one’s mark on a translation is a new phenomenon – even among translations of Aristophanes, for instance, there are the bold experiments of William Arrowsmith and Douglass Parker, whose versions of *Acharnians*, *Birds*, and *Clouds* (Arrowsmith) and *Wasps* and *Lysistrata* (Parker) date from the early 1960s.¹¹ Subtle examples of foreignization are also to be found in Henderson’s Loeb translations of Aristophanes’ plays, such as in his version of *Frogs*, where he uses strikingly modern vocabulary, including ‘minestrone’, ‘munchies’, and ‘lummox’ (lines 62, 510, 1037), or in *Assemblywomen*, where we find ‘psychopath’ and ‘salsa’ (lines 250 and 292: the luxury of a parallel text meaning, of course, that a reader with Greek can quickly identify the word with whose translation Henderson has toyed).¹² Henderson’s choice of these far from bland words no doubt represents an attempt to make the dialogue lively and contemporary for a reader (in the same way that Aristophanes’ Greek would have struck *his* audience as lively and contemporary) and so raise some interesting questions of cultural equivalence – a consideration that will resurface several times in the course of this discussion.

Given the nature of the competing demands on translators of Aristophanes, who find themselves confronted with a source text that is simultaneously a comic drama, a literary classic, and a rich social-historical source, one particularly useful lens through which to view the problems inherent in translating his plays is Katarina Reiss’s triadic

¹⁰ L. Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility. A History of Translation* (London and New York, 1995), 20.

¹¹ W. Arrowsmith, *The Acharnians by Aristophanes* (New York, 1961); idem, *The Birds by Aristophanes* (New York, 1961); idem, *The Clouds by Aristophanes* (New York, 1962). D. Parker, *The Wasps by Aristophanes* (New York, 1962); idem, *Lysistrata by Aristophanes* (New York, 1964).

¹² J. Henderson, *Aristophanes III. Birds, Lysistrata, Women at the Thesmophoria* (Cambridge, MA, 2000). In practice, the line between ‘domestication’ and ‘foreignization’ can sometimes be difficult to draw, however, and a case might equally be made for some of Henderson’s self-consciously modern and/or colloquial vocabulary (such as ‘minestrone’ for *έρνος*) being ‘domesticating’.

model of ‘informative’, ‘expressive’, and ‘operative’ translations.¹³ To what extent is the translation to be ‘informative’ and convey factual information about, for instance, its source culture? To what extent are the aesthetic (‘expressive’) dimensions of the text to be highlighted? And to what extent is the text to be ‘operative’ and induce certain behaviour in the audience, be that behaviour feeling sympathy with a certain point of view conveyed by the Aristophanic text, or even perlocutionary effects such as laughing or smiling in response to instances of humour? Translators rarely ignore any of these vectors, but the relative importance attached to each will inevitably differ depending on the extent to which a translation of Aristophanes (be it of a whole play or a segment) is intended as, say, a teaching text, a crib, a performable or performance text, a free-standing piece of literature, and so on. Needless to say, even when the aims of two translators largely coincide, widely different products can nevertheless result.

Other facets of translation theory are no doubt also relevant to consider in relation to Aristophanes, such as the challenges of translating dramatic texts – a relatively neglected area, where an issue as central as ‘performability’ is still contentious (not least because it resists easy definition).¹⁴ Where humour is to be found in Aristophanes’ songs this also throws up problems for the translator,¹⁵ as does the question of how to reflect non-standard language (Arrowsmith’s and Parker’s translations represent a rare attempt to foreground the exuberance of Aristophanes’ language in translation, though other translators have sought to capture it in a more muted way). However, one topic in translation studies goes right to the heart of the difficulties that Aristophanic lyric throw up for the translator – namely, the theoretical positions that have been adopted concerning the translation of poetry.

¹³ Articulated in Reiss (n. 5), for example.

¹⁴ See, for example, S. Bassnett, ‘Still Trapped in the Labyrinth: Further Reflections on Translation and Theatre’, in S. Bassnett and A. Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures. Essays on Literary Translation* (Clevedon, 1998), 94–5. For discussion of the translation of classical drama in general and of ancient Greek comedy in particular, see Walton (n. 2), chs. 1, 8, and 9. Walton posits that: ‘There is always likely to be a gulf between those whose classical training demands a respect for the play on the page, in the context of the society of ancient Greece, and those for whom text is pretext, no more than a map from which they wish to create a landscape of their own imagination’ (15).

¹⁵ The challenges of translating Aristophanic humour are discussed in Robson (n. 2).

Translating poetry

In his preface to *The Destruction of Troy* (1656), a version of the second book of the *Aeneid* composed in graceful rhyming couplets, Sir John Denham makes the following statement about the translation of poetry:

Poesie is of so subtile a spirit, that in poring out of one Language into another, it will evaporate; and if a new spirit be not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a *Caput mortuum* ['dead head', i.e. 'worthless residue']...¹⁶

Denham, then, forms part of a long tradition of thinkers who not only see the translation of verse as presenting a special challenge for the translator but also judge it to be the job of a translator to adapt and add to the original poem in order to create a living text in the target language. Part of what lies behind such a pronouncement is no doubt an awareness of the huge number of complex factors that go into making poetry what it is – an intricate marriage of content and form, which must inevitably be dismantled in the process of translation. Predictably enough, theorists have sought to articulate what the salient qualities of poetry are which are in danger of being lost in translation, with candidates including: word choice and word order, rhyme, assonance and alliteration, sound-symbolism, ambiguity, figurative language, and metaphor (not all of which are considerations equally important in every poem, of course, nor exclusive to poetry).¹⁷ Equally predictably, a number of poets, translators, and theorists have made prescriptive comments on how the translator should go about his or her task, offering views on which qualities of a poem it should be the translator's priority to preserve and which can reasonably be sacrificed. Such considerations are addressed by Ezra Pound, for example, who devised an intriguing trinity of terms for discussing poetic translation: *melopoeia*, *phanopoeia*, and *logopoeia*. Pound concluded that *melopoeia*, the music of poetry, which directs the poem's meaning, was generally untranslatable; that *phanopoeia*, the creation of images in a language, *could* often be successfully transferred; and that, while *logopoeia*, 'the dance of the intellect among the words', was untranslatable, it might

¹⁶ Quoted in D. Weissbort, 'Poetry', in *France* (n. 3), 91.

¹⁷ For an overview of the considerations to be taken into account by the translator of poetry, see V. Stog, 'Translating Poetry', *Intertext* 1–2 (2008), 188–201.

nevertheless be paraphrased.¹⁸ More recently, influential theories of poetry translation have been articulated by scholars such as André Lefevere and James Holmes (on which see below).

What Denham and Pound have in common, of course, is that their instincts as translators belong very much to the ‘imitation’ end of the spectrum.¹⁹ Here they are joined by the translations studies scholar Susan Bassnett who, in *Constructing Cultures*, lavishes praise on *Whoso List to Hunt*, Sir Thomas Wyatt’s reworking of Petrarch’s *Una candida cerva sopra l’erba* (Rime 190), calling it ‘a translation that enables us to see how cleverly the translator has read and reworked the source text to create something new and vital’.²⁰ Bassnett’s discussion is noteworthy not only for the fact that it continues the tradition of praising ‘newness’ in the translation of poetry (cf. Denham’s ‘new spirit’ and Pound’s ‘Make it New!’) but also because it draws on other rich seams of translation theory. One of these is the idea of the translator as a reader first and writer second – someone who, in Weissbort’s memorable phrase, is faced with a ‘double labyrinth’ in that he or she must first find a way into the text (as a reader and critic) before finding a way out (as writer) – making poetry translation ‘the fusion of the creative and the critical’.²¹ Another is the idea that the poetry translator’s task is to seek and recreate the impulse that inspired the poem or, in the words of the French poet Yves Bonnefoy, ‘to relive the act which both gave rise to it and remains enmeshed in it’ – a conception of poetry translation which also aims to secure for the translator a place in the creative community.²² Particularly resonant for Bassnett is Shelley’s metaphor of the seed – an image deriving from his pronouncement on the difficulties of poetry translation, where the only hope of success is deemed to be the transferral of the poem’s ‘seed’ into new linguistic soil.

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London, 1954), 15–40 (originally published as ‘How to Read, or Why’, *New York Herald Tribune* ‘Books’ [1929]).

¹⁹ That said, semantically Denham’s version of the *Aeneid* is fairly close to the original Latin.

²⁰ S. Bassnett, ‘Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation’, in Bassnett and Lefevere (n. 14), 69.

²¹ D. Weissbort (ed.), *Translating Poetry. The Double Labyrinth* (London, 1989), x, paraphrasing Pound.

²² Y. Bonnefoy, ‘Translating Poetry’, in R. Schulte and J. Biguenet, *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida* (Chicago, IL, 1992), 188.

...it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as to seek to transfuse from one language to another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower – and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.²³

As productive and creative as Shelley's concept of poetry translation may be, the very injection of 'new spirit' into a translation such as Wyatt's reworking of the Petrarchian sonnet has its consequences, however. Since the translator has self-consciously reshaped the text, there is, after all, a sense in which a reader may be ill-served by the translation (however rich and skilful the reshaping may be). The issue is this: a monolingual Anglophone reader whose first encounter with Petrarch is through *Whoso List to Hunt* has no way of knowing which aspects of the hybrid text derive from Petrarch and which from Wyatt. To put it another way, at this imitative end of the spectrum, we are a long way from Nabokov's exhortation that: 'The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language has only one duty to perform...to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text'.²⁴ In short, the 'new spirit' can often serve to make the old 'letter' less easy to discern.

'Imitative' translations may be the prized solutions of some who ruminate on the problems faced by the poetry translator, but translations that belong to the 'metaphrase' end of the spectrum have their uses, too. For all the praise that has been lavished on Christopher Logue's reworkings of sections of the *Iliad*, for example, it is Richmond Lattimore's more-rather-than-less literal translation of the poem that is most frequently prescribed as a set text for undergraduates. Similarly in the case of Aristophanes, few students are asked to encounter Aristophanes for the first time through the medium of stage adaptations such as those by Ranjit Bolt or Sean O'Brien – for all their verve, energy, and imagination. Instead, most English-speakers' first encounter with Aristophanes in print is no doubt through one of the numerous modern translations of his plays that belong firmly in the realm of 'paraphrase'.²⁵ With this in mind, it is worth considering the nature of the choices made by a 'paraphrase' translator when faced

²³ P. B. Shelley, *Defence of Poetry* (1821), reprinted in H. F. B. Brett-Stone (ed.), *Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry; Shelley's Defence of Poetry; Browning's Essay on Shelley* (Oxford, 1937), 29.

²⁴ Nabokov (n. 6), 121.

²⁵ That said, when Aristophanes is translated and adapted for the stage, the versions of his plays that emerge tend to belong closer to the 'imitation' end of the spectrum (see below).

with the challenge of rendering poetry (such as Aristophanes' lyrics) into English.

Practical solutions to the problem of poetry

The late twentieth century saw the development of a number of taxonomies for classifying poetry translation developed by translator-cum-theorists working in the discipline of translation studies. One of the most cited of these appears in the work of André Lefevere, who, in *Translating Poetry. Seven Strategies and a Blueprint*, examines a number of translations of Catullus 64.²⁶ The seven strategies that he identifies include phonemic translation, where the translator attempts to recreate the sounds of the source language;²⁷ literal translation, namely word for word, in the manner of Dryden's 'metaphrase'; metrical translation, where the rhythm of the original is preserved; poetry into prose translation; rhymed translation; free-verse translation; and interpretation. This final category is divided into two sub-categories, with 'version' describing a translation that is semantically the same but physically different (i.e. that preserves substance but not form, as in the case of a piece of conventional verse reconceived as a concrete poem, for example); and 'imitation', which (like Dryden's category) is used to describe the kind of hybrid texts discussed above: a poem that is palpably different from the original but that nevertheless shares the same title, topic, and starting point. Lefevere's analysis is not merely descriptive, however: after finding various shortcomings in the translations that form the basis of his survey, his prescriptive solution is that the translator should attempt to convey not just the sense but the 'communicative value' of the original, with no one factor (such as sound, metre, or rhyme) taking precedence.²⁸ He adds that a translation of poetry must also be cast in a 'form which will most closely match the position the source text occupies in the literary tradition of the source language'.²⁹

²⁶ A. Lefevere, *Translating Poetry. Seven Strategies and a Blueprint* (Assen, 1975).

²⁷ Examples of 'phonemic' translation include the Zukofskys' homophonic renderings of poems by Catullus: C. and L. Zukofsky, *Catullus* (London, 1969). Their version of Catullus 70, for example, begins: 'Newly say dickered my love air my own would marry me all/whom but me, none see say Jupiter if she petted' (cf. the original Latin, which reads: *nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle/quam mihi, non si se Iuppiter ipse petat*).

²⁸ Lefevere (n. 26), 99.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 102. Lefevere has been criticized for his stance by Raczyński, for example: '[Lefevere's] position seems to preclude translating a poem written in rhyme and meter into anything other

Something that Lefevere's study helps us to understand better is the nature of the solutions that translators of poetry adopt in practice – which often stand in stark contrast to the extremes to which translators are exhorted to go in theory. Indeed, the midway solutions adopted by many translators involve a whole host of unglamorous compromises, as well as countless decisions both on the micro- and macro-level about how best to convey different aspects of the poem's form and meaning. For the translator of poetry there are often ways of conveying to the reader aspects of the original poem that may not be obvious from the translation – information that may appear as 'paratext' in the form of an introduction or footnotes and/or be conveyed through placing the original poem alongside the translation in the form of a bilingual text (these options are taken up by translators of Aristophanes, too, although the form that any paratext might take will, of course, be radically different when a translation is performed as drama). Even when copious notes accompany the English text, however, a number of difficulties inherent in 'paraphrase' translation persist. These not only relate to problems of finding appropriate equivalences in the target language on the level of meaning, sound, lexis, and so forth. There is also the challenge posed by all the realia, literary allusions, personal invective, and historical references with which Aristophanes' plays abound, the question of creating a text in the target language that reflects the 'deep structure' of the original and is more than the sum of its parts, and the judgements to be made about the extent to which a translator should resolve or leave open ambiguities, or should impose his or her understanding of the poem's meaning on the translated text (here we return to notions of the translator as critic).³⁰ In short, the translator of Aristophanes who does not cut him- or herself loose from the original text, but aims to convey its salient features by means of a 'paraphrase' translation, has many balls to keep in the air. And when it comes to the plays' lyric passages, there is one further decision to make: what to do about the fact that these are songs composed in a whole series of disparate metres.

than a vaguely poetical diction too timorous to assume the identity of an entirely new text' (G. J. Racz, 'Straight to the Source: Using Phaedrus and La Fontaine to Retranslate Fable V, 25, of Felix Maria Samaniego', *Romanic Review* 91 [2000], 163–200).

³⁰ Weissbort comments that translations may be regarded as 'non-exclusive parallel texts, functioning both as commentaries on the source text and as texts in their own right': Weissbort (n. 16), 89. The opinion of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, however, is that: 'The business of the translator is to report what the author says, not explain what he means' (quoted by S. Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, third edition [London and New York, 2002], 70).

Transposing and transforming Aristophanes' verse forms

One theorist to have tackled the issue of conveying the rhythm of poetry in translation head on is the scholar and translator James Holmes, in whose work we find a much cited taxonomy for categorizing verse translation.³¹ Holmes's categories are useful not only because they provide a basis for examining different approaches taken by translators of Aristophanic lyric but also because they allow us to trace broad historical changes in the way that this task of translation has been approached – and to spot where there are exceptions to the general rule.

Holmes's four categories – 'mimetic', 'analogical', 'content-derivative', and 'deviant' – all concern the formal characteristics of the translated poem.³² A 'mimetic' version of a poem, for instance, is one that attempts to reproduce the rhythms of the poem in the target language (thus a 'mimetic' translation of the *Iliad*, say, would be one that employed dactylic hexameters in the English version of the text). Modern translators of Aristophanes rarely, if ever, attempt mimetic translations, but in earlier periods this was not the case, and the nineteenth century in particular witnessed numerous experiments with reproducing classical rhythms in English verse. Swinburne's rendering of a forty-line section of the *Birds' parabasis* – his 'Grand Chorus of Birds from Aristophanes' – is a particularly notable tour-de-force, in which he seeks 'to renew as far as possible for English ears the music of this resonant metre', namely the anapaestic tetrameter catalectic. Here, for example, the play's Chorus lists the blessings that humans receive from their avian benefactors (*Birds* 708–13):

*All best good things that befall men come from us birds as is plain to all reason:
For first we proclaim and make known to them spring, and the winter and
autumn in season;
Bid sow, when the crane starts clanging for Afric, in shrill-voiced emigrant
number,
And calls to the pilot to hang up his rudder again for the season, and slumber;*

³¹ J. S. Holmes, 'Forms of verse translation and the translation of verse form', in *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies* (Amsterdam, 1994), 23–33 (originally published in J. S. Holmes [ed.], *The Nature of Translation. Essays on the Theory and Practice of Literary Translation* [The Hague and Paris, 1970], 91–105).

³² Holmes's interest is in verse translations but, as he comments, a fifth option is to translate poetry into prose (*ibid.*, 25).

*And then weave cloak for Orestes the thief, lest he strip men of theirs if it freezes.
And again thereafter the kite reappearing announces a change in the breezes...*³³

Rogers, whose editions of the plays were published in the early twentieth century, is another translator who regularly aims to reflect the versification of the original Greek in his translations. Not that his translations are always fully 'mimetic': sometimes he simply gives a rough approximation of the rhythm, as is the case with his translation of the prelude to the *Birds'* *parabasis*, where the complex aeolic rhythms (mainly glyconic, i.e. — — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ —) of the original are echoed rather than fully recreated (*Birds* 676–84):

*O darling! O tawny throat!
Love, whom I love the best,
Dearer than all the rest,
Playmate and partner in
 All my soft lays,
Thou art come! Thou art come!
Thou hast dawned on my gaze,
I have heard thy sweet note,
Nightingale! Nightingale!
Thou from thy flute Softly-sounding canst bring
Music to suit With our songs of the Spring:
Begin then I pray
Our own anapaestic address to essay.*³⁴

At other times, however, when the original rhythms are less challenging to reproduce in English, Rogers reflects the versification of the original far more faithfully. Like Swinburne before him, he apes the rhythm of the main section of the *Birds'* *parabasis*, confidently mirroring, for instance, the anapaestic tetrameter catalectic of the original (*Birds* 708–13):

*And the chiefest of blessings ye mortals enjoy, by the help
of us birds ye obtain them.
'Tis from us that the signs of the Seasons in turn, Spring,
Winter and Summer are known.
When to Libya the crane flies clanging again, it is time for*

³³ A. C. Swinburne, 'Grand Chorus of Birds from Aristophanes', in *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London, 1904), vv. 42 and 44. Swinburne freely admits that he departs from the Aristophanic original both in his use of rhyme and also in the fact that he does 'not [attempt] the impossible and undesirable task of reproducing the rare exceptional effect of a line overcharged on purpose with a preponderance of heavy-footed spondees' (42).

³⁴ B. B. Rogers, *The Birds of Aristophanes* (London, 1906).

*the seed to be sown,
 And the skipper may hang up his rudder awhile, and
 sleep after all his exertions,
 And Orestes may weave him a wrap to be warm when he's out on his thievish
 excursions.
 Then cometh the kite, with its hovering flight, of the advent of Spring to tell...*

One danger of mimetic translation, of course, is that, since the rhythm is the dominant concern for the translator, other elements of the lyric may be reflected less well in the translation (Swinburne's translation of *Birds* 708–11 in particular could reasonably be said to contain some padding, as well as some poetic-sounding items that do not fully reflect the register of the original words, e.g. 'slumber' for *καθεύδειν* or 'Afric' for *Λιβύη*).³⁵ Interestingly, too, Swinburne and Rogers do not simply stop at reproducing the lyrics' rhythms: they also set themselves the challenge of producing a rhymed translation (not a feature of the Aristophanic original, of course). Some translation studies scholars are certainly damning about attempts to use rhyme in translation: in *Translating Poetry*, Lefevere calls it 'doomed to failure from the start' – though arguably Swinburne's and Roger's versions of the *Birds*' *parabasis* show just how effective a rhymed, mimetic translation can be when produced by a skilled hand.³⁶

A further difficulty that a 'mimetic' translation has to negotiate is the fact that, as Holmes comments, 'since a verse form cannot exist outside language...it follows that no form can be "retained" by the translator as he moves from a source language to his target language'.³⁷ In other words, although 'an illusion of formal sameness is maintained',³⁸ the 'same' verse form is unlikely to possess identical resonances in the source culture and the receiving culture.³⁹ This is a particular issue with the verse forms used by Aristophanes, since these will often have had particular associations for his original audience. As Laetitia Parker points out, many metres used by Aristophanes

³⁵ Lefevere (n. 26), describes 'metrical' translation as 'a very rigorous straitjacket' (37).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁷ Holmes (n. 31), 26.

³⁸ Bassnett (n. 20), 62.

³⁹ Indeed, on occasion mimetic translations may even break new ground in the receiving culture either by introducing a new verse form or by extending the range to which a given metre is put – like Tennyson before him, Swinburne also penned bold compositions in classical rhythms, in poems such as 'Hendecasyllables' and 'Sapphics', for example. And so the new poem's 'mimetic' form may even have the potential to challenge a reader, in which case mimetic translation might usefully be classed as a 'foreignizing' strategy – albeit one that has the potential to enrich the target culture's poetic tradition. See Holmes (n. 31), 27–8.

are allusive in some way – thus dactylo-epitrites recall the epinician genre, for example, whereas trochaic tetrameter catalectic is strongly associated with tragic recitative (especially that of Aeschylus).⁴⁰ Other rhythms might be appropriate for dancing (cretics), running (trochees), or processional song (anapaests).⁴¹ Others still might reasonably be classed as ‘noble’ (e.g. dactyls or syncopated iambic trimeters).⁴² It is a rare English-speaker who will pick up (m)any of these associations from a mimetic translation of a lyric of Aristophanes.

A further point to note is that some rhythms used by Aristophanes would simply make no recognizable audible pattern for an English-speaker. Such is the case with the complex aeolic metres whose rhythms Rogers elects not to reproduce in his translation of *Birds* 676–84, for example (quoted above). Faced with a section of verse like this, the translator keen to reflect the versification of the original has little choice but to choose a metrical structure that is more meaningful in the receiving culture. So, as a result of a whole series of considerations, a translator may decide to employ a different, substitute metre – which is what Holmes calls ‘analogical’ translation.

An ‘analogical’ translation – the second of Holmes’ categories – therefore involves a formal shift (that is to say an alteration to, rather than an aping of, the rhythm of the original poem). And this shift is made on the basis of the translator making a decision about the position occupied by the original metre in the source culture and how best to reflect this in the target culture. This is an art rather than a science, of course, and requires some complex judgements. The overall effect of the ‘analogical’ form, according to Holmes, is to ‘bring the original poem within the native tradition’,⁴³ and employment of this form can thus usefully be regarded as belonging to the tradition of what Venuti would call ‘domestication’.

Arguably, there is no translator of Aristophanes who exclusively casts his or her lyrical translations in an ‘analogical’ form, although some translators come closer than others. Arrowsmith, for example, talks of his decision to use ‘the norm of English dramatic verse, the blank’ to translate the spoken parts of the plays, but to render ‘[t]he longer anapaestic and trochaic lines...by a six beat movement’ (that said, his translations are at their most striking when he deviates from

⁴⁰ L. Parker, *The Songs of Aristophanes* (Oxford, 1997), 89 and 36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 41, 36, and 59.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5 and 15.

⁴³ Holmes (n. 31), 27.

these rules).⁴⁴ A more recent translator of Aristophanes, some of whose versions of lyric passages might loosely be called ‘analogical’, is Stephen Halliwell, whose comments from the introduction to his 1997 Oxford World Classics volume are worth quoting at length. Here, he calls into question the efficacy of what Holmes would call ‘mimetic’ translation and spells out his own rationale, stating that, as far as translating lyric is concerned:

...it would be pointless to follow Rogers and several of his Victorian predecessors in aiming for anything like a consistent correlation with Greek rhythms.... In some passages, however, it is feasible to capture part of the rhythmical ethos in at least an approximate manner, either by the general ‘shape’ and length of metrical phrases or by some of their dominant rhythms. My strategy...has been to employ marked English stress patterns in a few contexts where they can provide an intelligible match for the original...but often to allow myself a more fluid, free-verse technique.⁴⁵

Halliwell’s general tactic, then, is to employ rhythm in his translations of lyric and for this to reflect the rhythm of the original when appropriate, but by no means always. His decision as to which metre to use does not depend so much on questions of cultural equivalence, however (as would be consistent with a fully ‘analogical’ approach), but rather on a pragmatic judgement as to whether the original rhythm (or an approximation thereof) will be meaningful to an English-speaker’s ear. The effect that he achieves in the case of an anapaestic lyric can be judged from the following, his version of *Birds* 209–22, the anapaestic Hoopoe’s song:

HOOPOE *Come, nest-mate of mine, wake up from your sleep!
Issue forth all the strains of the sacred chants
In which you lament, with a mouth that’s inspired,
For the child of us both, oh piteous Itys!
Let your voice thrill the air with its liquid notes,
Through your vibrant throat! For your song is so pure
As it echoes around, through the rich-leaved trees,
Till it reaches the throne of lord Zeus up above,*

⁴⁴ Arrowsmith, *Birds* (n. 11), 13–14, where he also talks of the ‘triplet-line’ that he adopts for his translation of the first part of the play’s *parabasis*. In respect of his 1987 translation of *Lysistrata* for Focus Classical Library, Jeffrey Henderson talks of his use of ‘[b]lank verse for the dialogue and iambic or trochaic long-verses for epirrhematic speech...since they are similar to the original and familiar to English speakers’: J. Henderson, ‘Translating Aristophanes for Performance’, in N. Slater and B. Zimmermann (eds.), *Intertextualität in der griechisch-römischen Komödie* (Stuttgart, 1993), 83.

⁴⁵ S. Halliwell, *Aristophanes. A New Verse Translation. Birds, Lysistrata, Assembly-women, Wealth* (Oxford, 1997), li.

*Where Phoebus as well, gold-tressed god of song,
Hears your grief and responds on his ivory lyre,
As he summons the gods to take part in the dance.
Then is heard from above an immortal choir,
All in unison clear,
As the gods cry in grief for your plight.*

In his translation, Halliwell employs a subtly varied anapaestic rhythm, which he embellishes with occasional bursts of alliteration ('nest-mate of mine', 'gods cry in grief') and assonance ('piteous Itys', 'ivory lyre'). This often echoes sound effects to be found in the original lyric, albeit largely at different points (σύννομέ μοι, 209; ἐλελιζομένη διεροῖς μέλεσιν, 213; καθαρὰ χωρεῖ διὰ φυλλοκόμου, 215). Significantly, too, Halliwell rejects the use of rhyme – which distinguishes him not just from Swinburne and Rogers but from a great many modern translators of Aristophanes, as we shall see.⁴⁶

In relation to *Birds* 209–22, Halliwell's approach leads him to produce a lyric that is verging on (but nonetheless distinct from) a 'mimetic' translation. Elsewhere, however, his tactics lead him down a very different path. For example, he sets out other lyric passages as verse but – presumably because the original verses are iambic and thus metrically similar to the play's spoken parts – fails to employ any discernible rhythm. An example of this is his version of *Lysistrata* 271–80 – an iambic passage, far less elevated both metrically and lexically than the Hoopoe's song:⁴⁷

OLD MEN *I swear that while I live their plot will fail.
Why, even when Kleomenes seized this hill,
He did not leave unscathed.
For all his Spartan puff and prowess,
I made him drop his weapons.
He wore a little, patchy cloak;
He starved, he stank, he hadn't shaved
For six full years.*

Once again, Halliwell makes a nod towards the poetic qualities of the passage with some gentle alliteration ('puff and prowess', 'He starved, he stank'), perhaps reflecting the odd burst of alliterative colour in the original (for example, and especially, ἀπῆλθεν ἀψάλακτος, ἀλλ', 275).

⁴⁶ Indeed, in Halliwell (n. 3), 78, he comments that 'sustained use of rhyme...tends to make Aristophanic lyrics too uniformly jaunty'.

⁴⁷ Comprising an iambic trimeter, two iambic dimeters, an iambo-cretic, and an iambo-bacchaic.

However, the everyday, unexceptional vocabulary (which reflects the unelevated diction of the Greek) and the absence of any dominant metrical pattern give this lyric an altogether different feel from the mellifluous and elevated song of the *Birds*' Hoopoe.

Among modern translators Halliwell is rare in his ambitions to produce literate poetry – indeed, it is no coincidence that, in the comments cited above, he mentions ‘Rogers and...his predecessors’: who else would he compare his work in this area to? Hardly that of a performance translator such as Meineck, whose version of the *Birds* lyric may well be jaunty and irresistible but is hardly a counterpart to the Aristophanic original in terms of linguistic elevation.⁴⁸

*HOOPOE: Come my darling, rise from slumber,
Fill the air with your holy number.
Cry the keen from lips divine,
Sing for Itys, both yours and mine.
Pour forth the melody, honey-sweet,
Raise the warble, chirp the tweet.*

Here we are firmly in the realm of a different style of translation altogether, albeit one that resists straightforward classification using Holmes's taxonomy. Maybe Meineck's poem is best classified as ‘analogical’, with the bouncy rhymes conceived as a modern equivalent (on some level) of the anapaests of the original. But perhaps it comes closest to Holmes's third category. This is the ‘content-derivative’ or ‘organic’ form, whereby the translator starts with the semantic material and allows the text to shape itself – the dominant strategy in the twentieth century, according to Holmes.⁴⁹ The translation of the Cleomenes lyric from *Lysistrata* into free verse, as accomplished by, say, Patric Dickinson (1957), fits comfortably into Holmes's conception of this ‘content-derivative’ category:

*Why, that Kleonomes, the first man to seize it,
Did he get away scot-free?
No! he surrendered to me,
For all his Spartan spirit,
Wearing only a clot of filthy cloth*

⁴⁸ P. Meineck, *Aristophanes. Clouds, Wasps, Birds* (with introduction by I. C. Storey), (Indianapolis, 1998), 283.

⁴⁹ Holmes (n. 31), 27.

*Unshaven, lousy, stinking
Six years without a bath!*⁵⁰

The last of Holmes' four categories is what he calls 'deviant or extraneous form', where the translator uses a new form that is not signalled in any way in the source text. The precise boundaries of this category are once again difficult to draw, but one translator whose work certainly shows 'deviant' characteristics on occasion is William Arrowsmith. His version of the end of the anapaestic *pnigos* from the *Birds*' *parabasis*, for example, reads as follows (*Birds* 729–36):

*Last of all, we guarantee
to every single soul on earth,
his sons and their posterity:*

*HEALTH
WEALTH
HAPPINESS
YOUTH
LONG LIFE
LAUGHTER
PEACE
DANCING*

*and
LOTS TO EAT!
We'll mince no words.
your lives shall be
the milk of the Birds!*

*We guarantee
you'll all be
revoltingly
RICH!*⁵¹

Not only is this lyric 'deviant' in its form, but it also sits at the 'imitative' end of the spectrum in that it both condenses and modifies the meaning of the original Greek. Its form, however, with its short lines and capital letters, might reasonably be said to capture the breathlessness of the *pnigos* – and the choice to render these lines in this way is particularly effective, one might add, since it contrasts with

⁵⁰ P. Dickinson, *Aristophanes Against War. The Acharnians, The Peace, Lysistrata* (London, 1975), 117. One could also make the case that Halliwell's free-verse translations of lyric (like that of *Lysistrata* 271–80, quoted above) fit more comfortably into the 'content-derivative' than 'analogical' category.

⁵¹ Arrowsmith, *Birds* (n. 11), 69.

other lyric passages in Arrowsmith's translation, the majority of which are cast in conventional rhythms.

One key point to emerge from this brief survey of lyric translations is that any given translator's work, when taken as a whole, will often resist easy categorization in terms of Holmes's schema. Rogers, for example, tends to produce lyrics that are 'mimetic' or at least 'mimetic'-leaning, but that on occasion differ quite radically in rhythm from the original (and so may be best classed as 'analogical' or even 'content-derivative'). Arrowsmith's output is similarly wide-ranging, with 'analogical' and 'deviant' perhaps where he is most comfortable as a lyricist. Halliwell's work is particularly challenging to classify: his near-'mimetic' translations aside, where do his other creations most neatly fit – as 'analogical', 'content-derivative', or something else? And yet here is an example of a translator with a clear and cogent rationale for the way that he approaches his work.

Focusing too closely on the work of Rogers, Arrowsmith, and Halliwell may serve to obscure another important point, however: namely that, in practice, many translators show only limited variation in the metrical technique that they employ for translating all the lyrics in a given play. Meineck, for instance, routinely uses rhymed verse for his lyrics (albeit with variations in the line length and rhyme schemes, and *parabases* largely in free verse). Conversely, Dickinson characteristically uses free verse, although again the line lengths vary (Dickinson is also keen on alliteration in his lyrics, as might be judged from his translation of the *Lysistrata* ode quoted above). Other translators consistently use prose, such as Sommerstein in his Aris & Phillips editions of the plays or Henderson in his Loeb series (both something of a special case, in that they are bilingual texts and therefore sit at the 'metaphrase' end of the spectrum).

Although Holmes's categories are sometimes problematic with regard to translations of Aristophanic lyric, his schema does at least allow us to trace a rough chronology of translation styles, from the 'mimetic' instincts of Swinburne and Rogers to the 'content-derivative' form of much twentieth-century translation (with the 'deviant' experiments of Arrowsmith emerging in the 1960s). 'Analogical' forms are perhaps less easy to place historically, not least because, in the absence of specific comments by the translator, it is not always easy to judge whether a given version of a lyric belongs to this translation type (and, as will by now be more than apparent, there is a certain fuzziness in the definition of all these categories). A further advantage of looking

at translations of lyric through the lens of the schemas developed by Holmes and Lefevere (rather than, for instance, attempting to develop an original system of classification) is that it allows us to see which categories are poorly represented in Aristophanic translation; in this way we can gain a broad impression of how Aristophanic translators, taken as a whole, differ in their approach to their task from translators of other types of poetry. It is instructive, for example, that certain styles of translation are largely eschewed, such as Lefevere's category of 'phonemic' translation (where the translator attempts to recreate the sounds of the source language) and Holmes's category of 'deviant' translation. Using the categories of Holmes and Lefevere as a framework also allows us to see which categories tend to overlap in a given translator's work – such as the lyrical translations of Rogers, which not only straddle the 'mimetic'/'analogical' divide but also qualify as 'rhymed translation'.

When contemplating these existing taxonomies it is also interesting to consider what aspects of our translations they fail to capture. An obvious omission in both Holmes's and Lefevere's schemas (focused as they are on the translation of non-dramatic texts) is the extent to which many translators aim to produce lyrics that are performable as songs. The use of rhyming verse in recent translations-cum-adaptations of the plays destined for the stage is particularly striking: both Ranjit Bolt's *Lysistrata* (first performed in 1993) and Blake Morrison's *Lisa's Sex Strike* (which premiered in 2007) feature a series of musical numbers, for example (which appear even where no lyric passages feature in the Greek).⁵² In a similar vein, the 2007 *Clouds* staged by the small British theatre company *Kaloi k'Agathoi* was reconceived as 'a dazzling musical comedy' and consequently contained a whole host of big numbers. Noteworthy, too, is the fact that Bolt's *Lysistrata* and Sean O'Brien's adaptation of *Birds* (first performed at the National Theatre in London in 2002) are both rhymed throughout.

Among those translations that were not specifically conceived with performance in mind, perhaps the most conspicuous nod to the musical performance of Aristophanes' lyrics comes in the shape of the early Penguin translations. In his introduction to the first Penguin volume of the plays in 1964, Barrett refers to Aristophanes' lyrics as the translator's 'greatest problem' and talks of his decision to privilege

⁵² The script of Bolt's translation is published as R. Bolt, *Lysistrata by Aristophanes* (London, 2006).

the ‘wit and point of the originals’ in his translations and to preserve the ‘content rather than...the form’.⁵³ His decision to employ ‘simple ballad metres such as have always been favoured by writers of light verse in English’ demonstrates an ‘analogical’ approach of sorts, albeit one that perhaps ill serves some of Aristophanes’ more full-blooded tragic and devotional lyric pastiches.

The next volume of Aristophanes’ plays to be published by Penguin (in 1973) was translated by Alan Sommerstein.⁵⁴ Sommerstein took Barrett’s principles one step further and translated many of Aristophanes’ lyrics ‘with existing music in mind’ – to fit the tune either of Gilbert and Sullivan numbers or of popular songs.⁵⁵ His version of *Lysistrata* 275–80, for example, can be sung to the tune of *The Grand Old Duke of York*:

CHORUS: *The grand old Spartan king,
He had six hundred men,
He marched them into the Acropolis
And he marched them out again.
And he entered breathing fire,
But when he left the place
He hadn’t washed for six whole years
And had hair all over his face.*⁵⁶

Sommerstein undertook a wholesale revision of his translation of this ode for the 2002 edition of the text, removing the obvious verbal parallels with the traditional song (the revised version begins ‘He seized our citadel/But didn’t go scot-free’) – though the rhythm and rhyme scheme remained intact. While his original decision to translate the ode in the way he did may seem quaint, naïve, or simply wrongheaded to a modern reader, presumably the young Sommerstein was keen to convey to his readers that the lyric parts of Aristophanes’ plays were something distinct from the spoken parts, as Barrett and many others have done both before and since. Likewise, he was no doubt

⁵³ D. Barrett, *Aristophanes. The Wasps, The Poet and the Women, The Frogs* (Harmondsworth, 1964), 30.

⁵⁴ A. H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes. Lysistrata, The Acharnians, The Clouds* (Harmondsworth, 1973). Sommerstein himself tells the story of how he came to translate the plays for Penguin in A. H. Sommerstein, ‘How Aristophanes got his A&P’, in L. Kozak and J. Rich, *Playing Around Aristophanes*, 130–1.

⁵⁵ Sommerstein, *Lysistrata* (n. 54), 37, where he also comments that ‘there is a great deal in Gilbert that reminds one of Aristophanes’. For further discussion of his principles, see A. H. Sommerstein, ‘On Translating Aristophanes: Ends and Means’, *G&R* n.s. 20 (1973), 147–50.

⁵⁶ Sommerstein, *Lysistrata* (n. 54), 190–1.

conscious of the need to make his translations performable – and saw sung lyric passages as a key part of any performance. His Penguin Aristophanes may make an odd pairing in many ways with recent versions of the comedies commissioned for the stage (such as those of Bolt and Morrison), but the thread that links them is the presence of lyrical passages that are designed to be sung. Arguably, what is most urgently missing, then, from Holmes's and Lefevere's taxonomies of poetry translation as far as Aristophanic lyric is concerned is the category of 'melic' translation – a lyrical translation composed with sung performance in mind.

A case study: *Acharnians* 263–79 (the Phallic Song)

In this section, we turn our attention to what is perhaps one of Aristophanes' most discussed odes, *Acharnians* 263–79, the so-called Phallic Song. This lyric presents the translator of Aristophanes with an interesting set of challenges, containing as it does a complex range of lexical items (such as an intriguing coinage in the form of *καταγιγαρτίσαι*); a liberal scattering of alliterative effects (e.g. *ἔκτω σ' ἔτει προσείπον εἰς*, 266); non-standard word order; and a pun (*μαχῶν/καὶ Λαμάχων ἀπαλλαγείς*, 269–70) – not to mention a reference to a morally problematic sexual act. A brief look at various translators' attempts to convey the diverse elements of the ode – along with its iambic rhythms – therefore has the potential to be highly instructive.

Let us first look at Rogers' metrically imitative translation of this lyric.

(Singing.) *O Phales, comrade revel-roaming
Of Bacchus, wanderer of the gloaming,
Of wives and boys the naughty lover,
Here in my home I gladly greet ye,
Six weary years of absence over;
For I have made a private treaty
And said goodbye to toils and fusses,
And fights, and fighting Lamachuses.
Far happier 'tis to me and sweeter,
O Phales, Phales some soft glade in,
To woo the saucy, arch, deceiving,
Young Thratta (Stymodore his maiden),
As from my woodland fells I meet her
Descending with my fagots laden,*

*And catch her up, and ill entreat her,
And make her pay the fine for thieving.
O Phales, Phales, come and sup,
And in the morn, to brace you up,
Of Peace you'll quaff a jovial cup;
And mid the chimney sparks our useless shield we'll hang.*⁵⁷

Rogers' verses are easy to make fun of, especially since there are phrases whose connotations have changed over the years – 'Descending with my fagots laden' probably has a piquancy now that it lacked in British English at the beginning of the last century – and words such as 'gloaming', 'ye', 'sup', and 'morn' may well serve to highlight the passage's status as poetry, but tellingly seem to stand in contrast to the immediacy, vigour, and general here-and-nowness of this fast-moving and invigorating lyric.⁵⁸ A further easy criticism to make of Rogers is his tendency to bowdlerize, yet he is hardly unique among Aristophanes' translators in this respect and far more recent translations have committed more misleading misrepresentations of Aristophanes' *μοιχὲ παιδεραστά* than Rogers does here with 'Of wives and boys the naughty lover'. To take one noteworthy example, Sommerstein's Penguin translation of the first lines of this ode (published in 1973) originally read:

*O Phales, as with Dionysos from tavern to bedroom you roam,
Six years it has been since I saw you, but now at long last I am home.
I've made my own peace with the Spartans, I'm finished with trouble and war,
And Lamachus, grandson of Ares, won't bother my mind any more.*⁵⁹

Not until 2002, when the revised Penguin edition of the plays was published, did Sommerstein's Phales become the somewhat more earthy 'seducer of boys and women'.⁶⁰

A striking aspect of the Phallic Song is its narration of what in the modern world would be considered an act of rape. If the details appear unclear in Rogers' version, then perhaps they emerge better in the 1998 Loeb version of the ode by Henderson:

⁵⁷ B. B. Rogers, *The Acharnians of Aristophanes* (London, 1910), 45 and 47. The original ode comprises a series of iambic rhythms, largely dimeters, trimeters, and tetrameters.

⁵⁸ Halliwell (n. 3) is critical of Rogers' use of archaizing vocabulary.

⁵⁹ Sommerstein, *Lysistrata* (n. 54).

⁶⁰ A. H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes. Lysistrata, The Acharnians, The Clouds* (Harmondsworth, 2002).

*Yes, it's far more pleasant, Phales, Phales,
to catch a budding maid with pilfered wood—
Strymodorus' Thratta from the Rocky Bottom—
and grab her waist, lift her up, throw her down
and take her cherry.⁶¹*

Henderson's 'take her cherry' translates the Aristophanic coinage *καταγιγαρτίσαι*, a verb that indicates something like 'squeeze the pip out of a grape' (or possibly 'to insert a grape pip', i.e. penis) and thus links into the wine imagery of the ode – and, indeed, of the play as a whole – in a way that Henderson's 'take her cherry' does not.⁶² Rogers' rendering of these lines is more euphemistic than either the Aristophanic or Hendersonian version and – more importantly, perhaps – is abstract where the original is concrete (even sensual, one might say), but where it *does* deliver is by squaring up to the morally problematic act of the sexual assault itself:

*And catch her up, and ill entreat her,
And make her pay the fine for thieving.*

Euphemistic as his antiquated 'ill entreat her' may be, it is at least possible to discern that a sexual act is being hinted at here (although the use of 'woo' and his description of Thratta as 'saucy' and 'arch' may well hint at a consensual act). It has been argued that the way that this ode is constructed invites audience members to adopt what has been called a 'guilt-free standpoint' to Dicaeopolis' sexual fantasy;⁶³ nevertheless, what is being described here can and has been read as a punishment rape – a detail which not every translator has chosen to reflect. In the 1998 translation of the ode by Jack Flavin for the Slavitt and Bovie Penn University series (which evidently owes much to Rogers' version of seventy years earlier) the nature of the assault is considerably softened:

⁶¹ J. Henderson, *Aristophanes: Acharnians, Knights* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

⁶² D. Olson, *Aristophanes. Acharnians* (Oxford, 2002), *ad loc.*, discusses three possible senses for *καταγιγαρτίσαι*, namely: (a) 'remove her seed'; (b) 'press her like a grape'; (c) 'stick my grape-stone/penis into her'.

⁶³ M. Silk, *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy* (Oxford, 2000), 187. Henderson describes this episode as 'playful sexual aggressiveness': J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse. Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, second edition (New York, 1991), 59. See also S. Halliwell, 'Aristophanic Sex: The Erotics of Shamelessness', in M. C. Nussbaum and J. Sihvola (eds.), *The Sleep of Reason. Erotic Experience and Social Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Chicago, IL, 2002).

*So goodbye to fights and feuds and fusses,
and good riddance, General Lamachusses.
O Phales, how much sweeter it is
to catch a pretty thieving maid
and lie in a soft inviting glade
and make her pay a fine of kisses.*⁶⁴

There are any number of reasons why Flavin may have chosen to translate the lines in the way he has, but a good candidate must surely be a desire to avoid confronting the morally problematic rape in these lines head on. In contrast, Rogers' euphemistic approach diverts attention away from the consummation and physicality of the act, whereas Henderson's 'take her cherry' takes a fresh, vibrant – and thus, one might say, celebratory metaphor – and turns it into a platitude. Each version has its own effect, each translator his own aesthetic and moral imperatives.

Here we are encroaching on one of the central decisions that translators have had to make over the years when translating Aristophanes: that is, how to deal with the sexuality of his plays. Bowdlerization before the 1960s and 1970s thereafter rapidly changed into a tendency to embrace and even to over-translate Aristophanic obscenity: that is, to introduce what for us are 'swear words' into the English text when there are no equivalents in the Greek.⁶⁵ Arguments can be made both ways as to whether this approach is justified: should words like 'fuck' be used in translations to reflect the comparatively greater use of such words in colloquial modern English as compared to colloquial classical Athenian Greek? Or does the overuse of such words serve to misrepresent the complex ways in which Aristophanes introduces and exploits obscene expression? Interestingly, though, what has also changed since the 1960s is gender politics, and so, while translators are now freer in their use of four-letter words, there may be the temptation to sidestep some of the less politically correct aspects of what Halliwell has called Aristophanes' sexuality of 'shamelessness'.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ J. Flavin, *Acharnians*, in D. R. Slavitt and P. Bowie, *Aristophanes*, 3. *The Archanians, Peace, Celebrating Ladies, Wealth* (Philadelphia, PA, 1998), 24.

⁶⁵ A good example of which comes in the form of George Theodoridis' translation of *Lysistrata*, <<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/Lysistrata.htm>>, accessed 28 April 2012.

⁶⁶ Halliwell (n. 63). In addition to sexual politics, racial politics have also proven a sensitive area in (North American) translations of Aristophanes: see, for example, E. Scharfenberger, 'Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai* and the Challenges of Comic Translation: The Case of William Arrowsmith's *Euripides Agonistes*', *AJP* 123 (2002), 429–63.

The verbal play in this passage comes in various guises. We have already seen how some translators deal with the pun on Lamachus' name (μαχῶν/καὶ Λαμάχων, 269–70): some find no parallel (e.g. Sommerstein, quoted above), others do (e.g. Rogers' 'toils and fusses... and...Lamachuses' or Arrowsmith's 'war neuroses and Lamachóses').⁶⁷ Rogers and Arrowsmith also attempt to capture this passage's sound effects in their translations, both of which display strong alliteration (often occurring in a different place from the original, however, and/or involving the repetition of a different set of sounds). Less easy to convey, perhaps, is the effect achieved by a series such as μέσῃν λαβόντ', ἄραντα, κατα-/βαλόντα καταγιγαρτίσαι (274–5), which obeys the law of ascending members (i.e. the items in the list grow in syllabic length) – although, to single out Rogers' translation once more, he arguably achieves a fair approximation with 'And catch her up, and ill entreat her,/And make her pay the fine for thieving'. Complex play with word order, such as that to be found at line 272, where a masculine participle is sandwiched within the feminine participle–noun–adjective phrase that forms its grammatical object (κλέπτουσαν εὐρόνθ' ὠρικὴν ὑληφόρον), will inevitably resist transferral into a language such as English, whose system of inflectional endings is no match for that of Greek.

This brief look at the problems faced by translators of the *Acharnians* ode – and the solutions they reach – provides an insight into the range of decisions that must be made both on the macro-level (such as how to deal with Aristophanic sexuality) and on the micro-level of the text (such as how to deal with alliteration, coinages, and effects created through the ordering of words in the original passage). The poetic qualities of this lyric have also come under specific scrutiny by scholars of Aristophanes such as Michael Silk, who has suggested that this Phallic Song is to be regarded as a singular literary achievement. How, then, have scholarly judgements on Aristophanic lyric affected the way in which translators approach their task – if at all? This question will form the subject of the following section.

⁶⁷ Arrowsmith, *Acharnians* (n. 11), 32.

Changing perspectives: the influence of scholarship on translation

Certain scholars have had a great deal to say about Aristophanic lyric in the last thirty years, the debate essentially having been initiated by Silk in his 1980 *Yale Classical Studies* article, 'Aristophanes as a Lyric Poet'.⁶⁸ Silk establishes a taxonomy of Aristophanic lyric, suggesting that there are essentially three distinct types of lyric discernible in his plays: 'high', 'low', and a hybrid kind, which he calls 'low lyric *plus*'. Silk seeks to demonstrate that Aristophanes' real achievement is not in the area of high lyric (such as the Hoopoe's Song) or low (such as the *Lysistrata* lyric about Cleomenes) but in the hybrid category – an example of which we have already met in the form of the *Acharnians*' Phallic Song. 'Low lyric *plus*' is, in Silk's words, 'not a mere *mixture*' but combines 'the vigour...of the low...with the formal grace and discipline of the high', resulting in 'an enlarged tonal and expressive range all round'.⁶⁹ At the beginning of his discussion, however, Silk paves the way for his positive assessment of these hybrid lyrics by undertaking a stinging critique of Aristophanes' high lyrics. He cites numerous quotations by scholars who have praised passages such as *Birds* 209–22 – the Hoopoe's Song to the Nightingale – or the off-stage 'parodos' of the *Clouds* (275–90), and then examines these passages one by one, in an attempt to demonstrate their defects. The Hoopoe's Song is judged by Silk to be 'a piece of hyper-conventional high-lyrical pastiche' with 'pointless repetitions, echoes, and prolixities',⁷⁰ whereas the *Clouds* song 'epitomizes Aristophanes' worst lyrical tendencies: triteness, inflation, and pervasive lack of point'.⁷¹ With friends like Silk, Aristophanes' high lyrics hardly need enemies.

Silk's analyses waited for some time for a substantial response, but in 1997 two came along at once.⁷² Laetitia Parker's is the more sympathetic to Silk's position, although she does take the opportunity to take him to task on a number of points in the introduction to *The Songs of Aristophanes*.⁷³ Perhaps inevitably, she finds Silk's tripartite division inadequate and criticizes him for not taking into account the lyrics' 'function as a constituent of a type of musical drama' – a

⁶⁸ M. Silk, 'Aristophanes as a Lyric Poet', *YCIS* 26 (1980), 99–151.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷² Other reactions to his 1980 article are discussed at Silk (n. 63), 166 n. 13.

⁷³ Parker (n. 40), 10–16.

sideswipe that inspired a muscular response from Silk in the *Times Literary Supplement*.⁷⁴ On many points she is in agreement with him, however: she talks of ‘the haze of piety and wishful thinking’ concerning Aristophanes’ high lyrics that prevailed before Silk’s article, and even develops certain of his ideas.⁷⁵ For instance, she gives Aristophanes’ elevated pastiches the name ‘light verse’, defining them as ‘interesting in conception and elegant in execution’ – though it is unclear whether she intends with this comment to resurrect their reputation or put the final nail in the coffin.⁷⁶ As for others of his lyrics, her views are unequivocal. She says:

A proportion of Aristophanes’ song is of virtually no poetic significance. It is in lyric metre because the genre requires it, because that is how choruses express themselves, because lyric metre and song confer of themselves a certain impetus and heightening of excitement.⁷⁷

In his 1997 *Maia* article ‘Aristophanes’ “High” Lyrics Reconsidered’, Gary Matthews mounts a spirited challenge to Silk.⁷⁸ He deems that Aristophanes’ elevated songs are ‘actually quite successful, and worthy of appreciation’ when judged by appropriate criteria; criteria, that is, that are ‘more sensitive to [the lyrics’] dramatic purpose than...those that Silk applies to them’.⁷⁹ Matthews’ attempt to revive Aristophanes’ reputation in this area was further met by a nuanced response by Silk in *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy* (2000), in a chapter that concedes some, but by no means all, of Matthews’ points.⁸⁰

To return to the question in hand, how, if at all, have translators reacted to Silk’s evaluation of Aristophanes’ lyrics and the subsequent debate? In the absence of specific comments, the matter is hugely difficult to judge – Sommerstein (an Aristophanic scholar in his own right, of course) is one of the few translators to acknowledge advances in scholarship, in his preface to his revised Penguin translations of *Lysistrata*, *Acharnians*, and *Clouds* (2002). His new version of the Phallic Song, for example, certainly reflects the sexuality of the passage more fully than his 1973 translation, and a prudish ‘having it

⁷⁴ Ibid., 10; M. Silk, ‘Putting on a Dionysus Show’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 August 1998, 18–19.

⁷⁵ Parker (n. 40), 10.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁸ G. Matthews, ‘Aristophanes’ “High” Lyrics Reconsidered’, *Maia* 49 (1997), 1–42.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁰ See esp. Silk (n. 63), 167 n. 14.

off for the Aristophanic *καταγγαρτίσαι* has been replaced by a more full-blooded and concrete ‘take out her grape-pip’. What is more, the linguistic range of the translation seems to have been increased, too, and relatively high-register items such as ‘nocturnal’ and ‘devout’ are now found at the beginning of the ode, in keeping with Silk’s observation that hybrid lyrics start high, dip low, and usually end low.

*O Phales, companion of Bacchus in nocturnal revel and rout,
Seducer of boys and of women, I give you my greeting devout!
Six years it has been, but I’ve gladly come home to my village once more,
I’ve made peace with the foe, and I’m finished with Lamachus, trouble and war!
O Phales, O Phales, I tell you it makes me feel vastly more good
When I find my old neighbour’s young slave-girl in the act of purloining
some wood,
Grip her tight by the waist, like a wrestler, and lift her up high off her feet,
Then throw her down back to the earth, like, and take out her grape-pip –
how sweet!⁸¹*

As for other translators, one is tempted to posit that Halliwell – another Aristophanic scholar – has also taken into account the work of Silk and others in this area. As far as the Hoopoe’s Song is concerned, for instance, in his version of the ode (quoted above), he has translated most, if not all, of the compound adjectives in the Greek with compound adjectives in English. He has also resisted the temptation to ‘improve on’ Aristophanes’ poetry, by eliminating the repetition and prolixity highlighted by Silk, while at the same time producing a lyric that it is arguably justifiable to call ‘interesting in conception and elegant in execution’, to borrow Parker’s phrase – and even, perhaps, ‘worthy of appreciation’, to borrow Matthews’. On the other hand, Halliwell’s decision not to translate the *Lysistrata* lyric as verse (also quoted above) could also be said to be in sympathy with Parker’s judgement that much Aristophanic lyric ‘is of virtually no poetic significance’.

As we move beyond the realm of the academic-cum-translator it becomes harder still to spot the influence of scholarly debate over translation – especially as non-academics, as a rule, tend to be more concerned with performability. Arguably, too, in comparison to academics, the work of non-academics tends to reflect the so-called ‘deforming tendencies’ (*tendances déformantes*) posited by the translation theorist Antoine Berman; that is to say, non-academic translators tend

⁸¹ Sommerstein, *Lysistrata* (n. 60), 23.

to normalize the text for the target-language reader by means of what Berman would call ‘rationalization’, ‘expansion’, and the like, with the result that some of the more difficult problems thrown up by the text are bypassed, making it more readily comprehensible to the reader.⁸² Flavin’s ‘fine of kisses’ may be thought of as such a rationalization, for example, in that it skirts around the problematic sexual act of the Phallic Song. The way in which details of the original plays are refashioned and updated in the adaptations of, for example, Bolt and O’Brien may also be considered a symptom of these ‘deforming tendencies’, although Berman’s far from value-neutral term perhaps does little justice to the spirit in which these versions of the plays are conceived, adapted as they are to be accessible to a non-specialist audience.

When tracing the influence of scholarship on translation, the work of Peter Meineck makes an interesting case study, since he is a translator who clearly feels a high degree of responsibility to the original material while also remaining sensitive to the needs of the audience (or, put another way, part of his responsibility towards the original material is displayed in his attempt to make it performable: for him, Aristophanes wrote for the stage and not the page).⁸³ Indeed, it may be argued that his jaunty version of the Hoopoe’s song, for example –

*Pour forth the melody, honey-sweet,
Raise the warble, chirp the tweet...*

is a conscientious attempt to convey to an audience, in the context of a performance, the very ‘triteness...and pervasive lack of point’ noted by Silk. Of course, other elements of the song have been left out or skewed, but that is the nature of ‘paraphrase’ translation: the translator must decide what is essential, what merely desirable, and what he or she is prepared or can afford not to convey. Translators may vary in how good they are at making those decisions, just as they vary in their abilities at writing an engaging text once those decisions have been made, but a vital part of most translators’ work is gearing their translation to a specific audience, and in crucial respects the performance translator has less leeway than the print translator, whose work can be both annotated and reread at leisure.

⁸² A. Berman, *L’épreuve de l’étranger. Culture et traduction dans l’Allemagne romantique* (Paris, 1984).

⁸³ Meineck (n. 48), xxxvii, talks of a play’s ‘existence as a written text [being] subordinate to its primary form and function as a live, shared experience between actors and audience’.

Conclusions

There are many important areas that have not been fully addressed in this article, not least crucial issues connected with the conveyance of Aristophanic language. While some inroads have been made into concepts of concreteness and abstraction, expressive range, and variation in register, the points made here are in much need of further development. One key issue is the conveyance of poetic and what Silk calls 'highfalutin' language – an area where modern translators understandably struggle to find suitable expression, given the relative foreignness of high-flown language (as opposed to merely technical language) to most speakers today. Indeed, the language of high poetry was no doubt far more familiar to, and easily assimilated by, Rogers' readers a century ago than it is today. The result is that Rogers and his predecessors were no doubt able to reflect the high register and high-flown expression of Aristophanes' lyrics in a way that would be difficult for a modern translator – for whom, in contrast, the obscene and sexual strata of Aristophanes' plays are far easier to convey. Here we return to issues of cultural transfer and, perhaps, we must resign ourselves to the fact that certain aspects of Aristophanes' work are simply more 'translatable' – both linguistically and culturally – in certain societies, languages, and eras than others.

Where we have made greater headway in this article is in mapping the range of options available to translators in terms of transposing, transforming, or ignoring the original rhythms of Aristophanes' lyrics. Here fashions certainly change, but not always in a linear or predictable way, as, for example, the recent re-emergence of rhyme as a central feature of many performance-orientated translations testifies. New fashions will continue to emerge as new ways of translating Aristophanes and his lyrics are found – a necessary process if these plays are to remain fresh and vital for future audiences. And discussions like this will also play a small yet vital role for both translators and audiences alike, providing would-be translators, readers, and audiences with a window onto the theory, demands, and lively practice of translating this most challenging of authors.

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